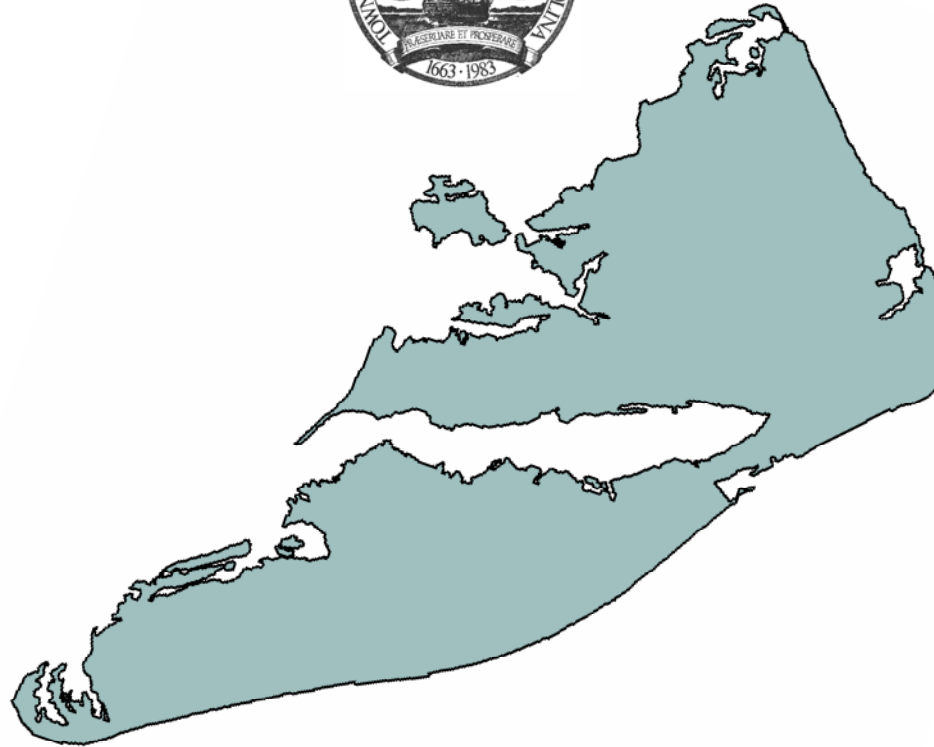


# HILTON HEAD ISLAND DESIGN GUIDE



## ISLAND CHARACTER VISION STATEMENT

DEVELOPMENT SHALL EXHIBIT A HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP  
WITH THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BY BLENDING  
THE PRINCIPLES OF SENSITIVE SITE PLANNING,  
SKILLFUL ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN  
AND AN EMPHASIS ON LANDSCAPING THAT  
PRESERVES AND ENHANCES THE NATIVE VEGETATION.

**THE GOAL OF THIS DESIGN GUIDE  
IS TO PRESERVE THE ISLAND CHARACTER  
BY DIRECTING DEVELOPMENT TO:**

- ❖ PRESERVE SIGNIFICANT EXISTING SITE FEATURES, TREES AND VEGETATION.
- ❖ TREAT THE LANDSCAPE AS A MAJOR ELEMENT OF THE PROJECT.
- ❖ PROVIDE LANDSCAPING OF A SCOPE AND SIZE THAT IS IN PROPORTION TO THE SCALE OF THE DEVELOPMENT.
- ❖ DESIGN AND MAINTAIN LANDSCAPING IN ITS NATURAL SHAPE AND SIZE.
- ❖ DESIGN STRUCTURES APPROPRIATE FOR THEIR USE AND NEIGHBORHOOD.
- ❖ PROMOTE PEDESTRIAN SCALE AND CIRCULATION.

- ❖ DEMONSTRATE THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF GOOD ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN.
- ❖ DESIGN STRUCTURES WITH SUBTLE VISUAL IMPACT AND UTILIZE NATURAL MATERIALS, TEXTURES AND COLORS.
- ❖ PROVIDE LIGHTING THAT IS ADEQUATE FOR SAFETY AND ENHANCES THE SITE.
- ❖ COORDINATE AND HARMONIZE THE DESIGN OF STRUCTURES, PARKING, AND SITE AMENITIES.
- ❖ PROVIDE CONTINUITY OF DESIGN ON ALL FACADES OF THE BUILDING.
- ❖ CONCEAL VISUALLY UNDESIRABLE UTILITIES AND EQUIPMENT.



## INTRODUCTION

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Hilton Head Island has long been recognized as an attractive place to live and visit. But what gives it its aesthetic appeal? Modern day development on the Island established a certain “look” based on our cultural and environmental heritage. The early developers, architects, landscape architects and planners recognized the importance of good design that was sensitive to the island’s history and natural environment. This theme evolved into what we today call Island Character.

Island Character is not a style of architecture. It can not be defined in simple terms or achieved by following a certain set of strict design requirements. Island Character is as much a process as it is an end product. It is also a philosophy about design; a philosophy that puts an emphasis on thorough consideration of all elements of a project.

This guide is meant to provide owners, developers and design professionals with an awareness of the major factors involved in order for projects to achieve an Island Character. Rather than an attempt to stifle good design it is meant to inspire the highest quality design. Its usefulness will depend on the extent that owners, developers and designers understand this concept and put forth the extra effort required to achieve Island Character.



# SITE DESIGN

A critical first step in achieving Island Character is a complete analysis of the site conditions. It is this information that will be the basis for determining how to design a project so that the result will compliment, not detract from, its surroundings. Frank Lloyd Wright instructed us to

*"build your house so that you may still look upon all that charmed you and lose nothing of what you saw before the house was built, but see more."*

For a project to achieve Island Character a site analysis must be used to identify features and constraints to be considered in order to lose nothing but see more. At a minimum a site analysis must identify topography, existing vegetation, significant trees, setbacks, buffers, street orientation, access points, and possibly wetlands and view opportunities. Once identified these items shall form the basis for the site design. They will determine the optimum

orientation of structures as well as the location of parking, storm water retention areas and other elements to be placed on the site. A good site design can not ignore

findings of the site analysis simply to satisfy the requirements of the development. This fact is the basis for achieving Island Character.



## **Topography**

While the island generally has little variation in topography it is important to identify the existing conditions in terms of drainage and flood elevation requirements. In consideration of the latter, innovative methods such as flood proofing and terracing should be utilized to reduce the effect of elevation requirements. Continuity of the pedestrian circulation between sites should also be maintained where appropriate. Where unique topographic variation does exist it should be identified in order to preserve it.



## **Existing Vegetation & Significant Trees**

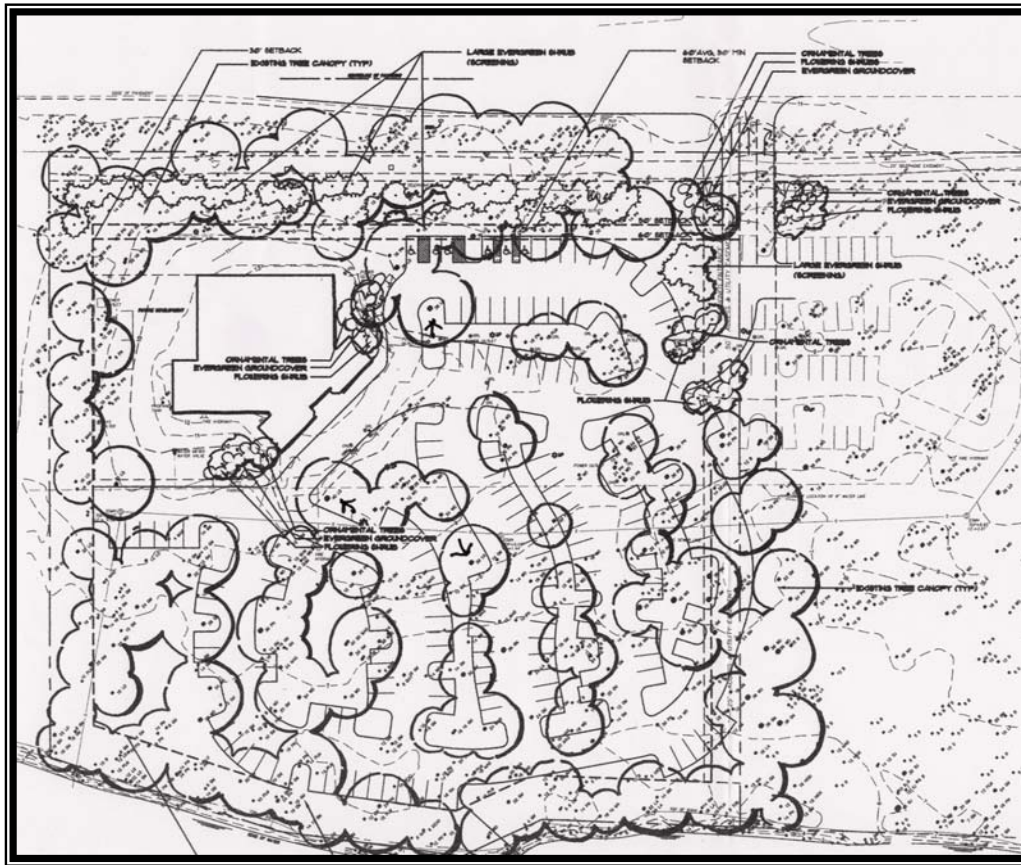
Two of the most important site features that need to be identified are existing vegetation and significant trees. These are extremely important elements to be addressed in the placement of structures and other site features. In some cases the location of a specimen tree will be the dominant determining factor in the site design as well as the architecture of the structures. Existing vegetation that can be preserved, especially in buffers, adds significantly to the project's Island Character as well as reducing the cost of new landscaping.

## **Setbacks & Buffers**

Adjacent use and street setback lines are specified in LMO Chapter 5, Article VII. Buffers must be identified as required in LMO Chapter 5, Article VIII in order to establish the extent of site features such as parking spaces and storm water retention areas. (See the section for buffers in the landscape section.) These are not "build to" lines but simply define the area in which structures and other development are allowed. Projects that fill the buildable area with structures and paving will have a very difficult time in achieving Island Character.







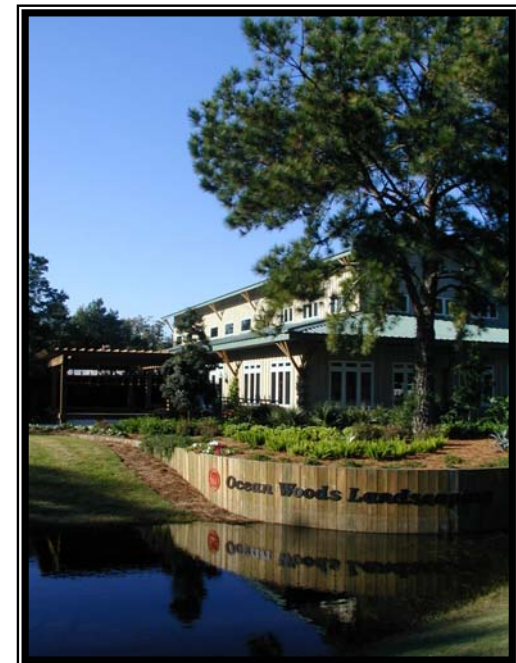
## Parking

Parking lot layout requirements are located in LMO Section 16-5-1206. Projects which require a large number of parking spaces should consider breaking the lot into several smaller areas separated by landscaped open space, other site features or structures. Where appropriate,

avoid large areas with rigid layouts but use staggered or meandering designs. This will help save trees, slow down vehicles and create site interest. When parking below buildings, provide adequate architectural and landscape screening to prevent a parking garage look.

## Storm Water Retention

While function is important in the design and location of these areas, aesthetic considerations must also be addressed. Whether dry or wet the shape and appearance should look natural and not detract from the overall site design. Consider planting native wetland vegetation where appropriate to filter runoff and provide visual interest.



## THE LANDSCAPE

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The landscape (the site's existing and new vegetation) plays an essential role in creating the Island Character. Its design and maintenance must therefore be given prominent attention starting at the conceptual phase of a project. Great care should be taken to preserve a variety of existing native trees and shrubs. Landscaping (planting of new vegetation) is to be used to supplement this existing vegetation and provide for a harmonious setting for the site's structures, parking areas or other construction. The landscape will contain three basic elements:



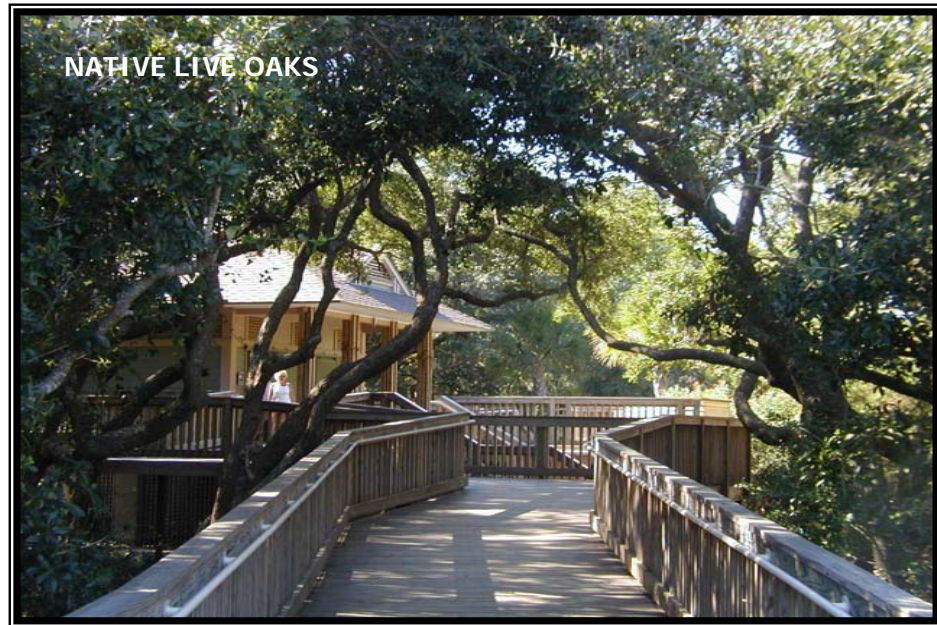


## Trees

Tree removal and replacement requirements are established in Article IV of Chapter 6 of the Town's LMO. While these minimum requirements must be adhered to, there are additional aesthetic considerations that must also be implemented when a tree removal or landscape plan is submitted. These include:

- preserving smaller under-story trees;
- requiring larger size replacement trees or additional trees depending on the size or number of existing trees or relationship to building mass and height;
- selection of particular species of replacement trees within a required category for screening or visual effect.

Top priority for the location of existing trees and new trees are street buffers, parking lots and between parking lots and the building. This is a major component of Island Character.





## Shrubs

Shrubs must be selected to compliment the natural setting, provide visual interest and screen less desirable elements of the project. The species used must take into consideration the site's growing conditions, existing vegetation types, and in some instances deer tolerance. While a variety of species is desirable for texture and color, emphasis must be given to overall order and continuity of the landscape plan. Seasonal availability and planting time period also need to be considered.

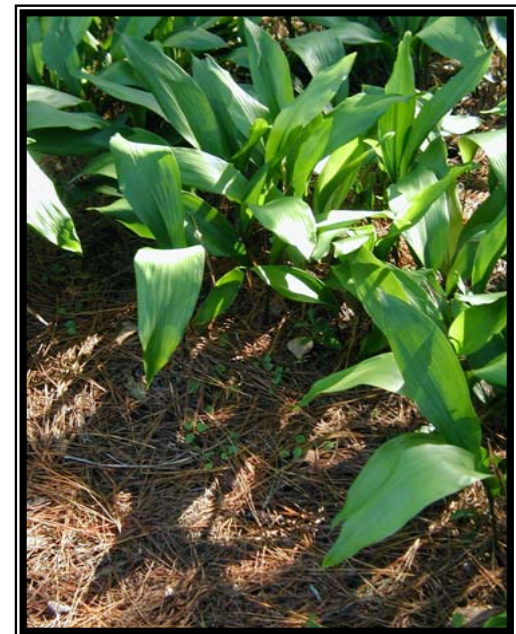


In general, native plants or plants that have historically been prevalent on the Island should be utilized. The number of plants will be determined by the scope of the project and the function of the landscaping. A variety of sizes is desirable to create a "layered" appearance for visual interest and a sense of depth. Placement of shrubs must also take into account the location of existing mature trees so as not to damage tree roots. Proper spacing and location are required to allow for plants to reach their mature size and natural shape while avoiding excessive or unnatural pruning.



## Groundcovers

Groundcover plants should generally be a limited part of the landscape plan. When used, evergreen species with low maintenance needs are to be selected. Large grassed lawn areas encompassing a major portion of the site are to be avoided. Grass is appropriate as borders or around entrances and other focal points. Pine straw or other mulch should be used to stabilize areas and control weed growth.

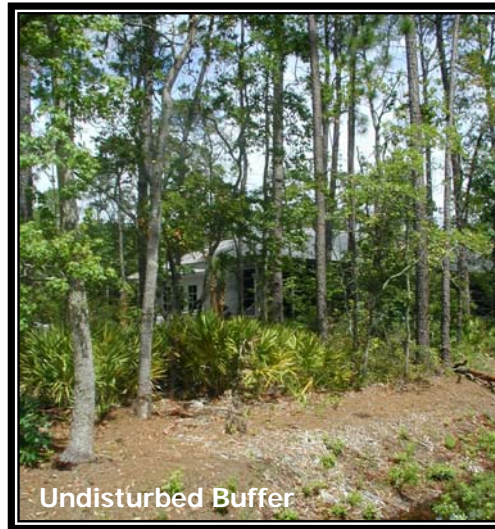




## Buffers

The most important component of buffers is the vegetation they contain. Buffers can be classified into three basic types:

- **Undisturbed Buffers.** A buffer where all of the existing vegetation is neither removed nor pruned.
- **Natural Buffers.** A buffer where some existing vegetation is removed or pruned. Some additional plant materials may be added to natural buffers to enhance their appearance. Any additional plantings should be native species or species common to the Island and complimentary to the existing vegetation. Their placement should be designed so that they appear as if they were a part of the existing vegetation.
- **Landscaped Buffers.** A buffer where most of the vegetation has been planted. Planting may be more formal and may be shaped by more extensive pruning.





The buffer type most appropriate for Island Character is the natural buffer. Any of the three types however may be appropriate for the Island Character depending on the situation. Undisturbed buffers are appropriate next to undeveloped land, along wetland boundaries or for wildlife habitat. Landscaped buffers are more suited to limited areas such as around freestanding signs or driveway entrances and along more urban street frontages.

In determining the most appropriate buffer for a project the designer should take into account the adjacent development so as not to depart too dramatically from the neighborhood. It may be necessary to transition the buffer design in order to blend with an adjacent buffer or to vary the buffer type for site design reasons.

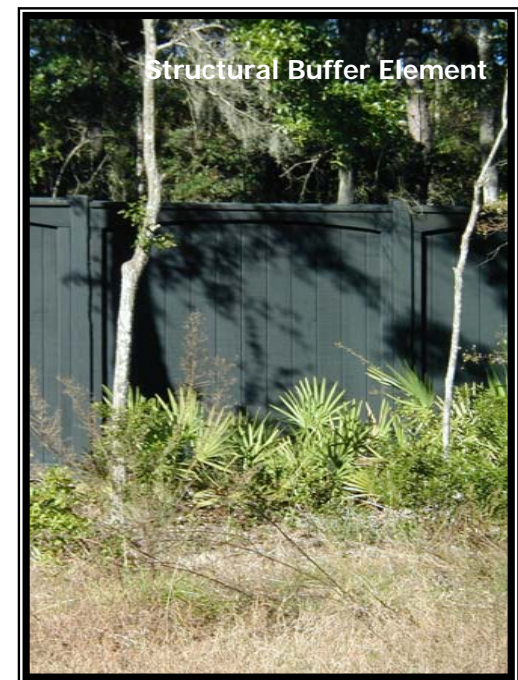
In some cases the LMO requires “structural elements” as part of a buffer. Typically this is a fence or screen of some type. When used these must be designed to complement the architectural design of the building(s) by the use of similar materials and detailing. They must be carefully located to avoid existing tree roots. Long straight expanses are not appropriate and the layout of the structural element should be varied for visual interest.



Wetland Buffer



Adjacent Use Buffer



Structural Buffer Element



*"THE ARCHITECTURAL  
DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION PHILOSOPHY...  
IS THAT BUILDINGS SHOULD BE UNOBTRUSIVE IN FORM AND COLOR  
IN ORDER TO COMPLIMENT THEIR NATURAL SETTING.  
THE MAIN CONCERN IS THAT THE TOTAL COMMUNITY BE HOMOGENEOUS  
IN FEELING IN A PARK-LIKE SETTING  
AND FREE FROM THE DISCORDANT ARCHITECTURAL SHAPES AND COLORS  
WHICH VIE FOR ATTENTION AND ATTEMPT TO CREATE GREATER VISUAL IMPACT  
THAN A NEIGHBOR'S."*

*CHARLES FRASER*

## ARCHITECTURE

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To achieve Island Character the architectural design of structures shall be visually harmonious with the overall natural appearance, history and cultural heritage of Hilton Head Island. Structures must be designed to be unobtrusive and set into the natural environment. They should demonstrate a strong relationship to the outside and avoid appearing foreign to the site. The use or function of a structure will also be a determining factor in its design but need not sacrifice the

intent of Island Character. A light industrial building can exhibit good Island Character as well as an office or multifamily project.

The context of the structure must also be taken into account and consideration shall be given to compatibility with other development in the area. Distinctive vernacular styles like Georgian or Mediterranean are to be avoided except where already established in defined neighborhoods such as Shelter

Cove or Main Street. "Franchise" or "theme" architecture is not appropriate for the Island. In addition, all sides of a structure should be given the same design consideration as the entrance or street façade.

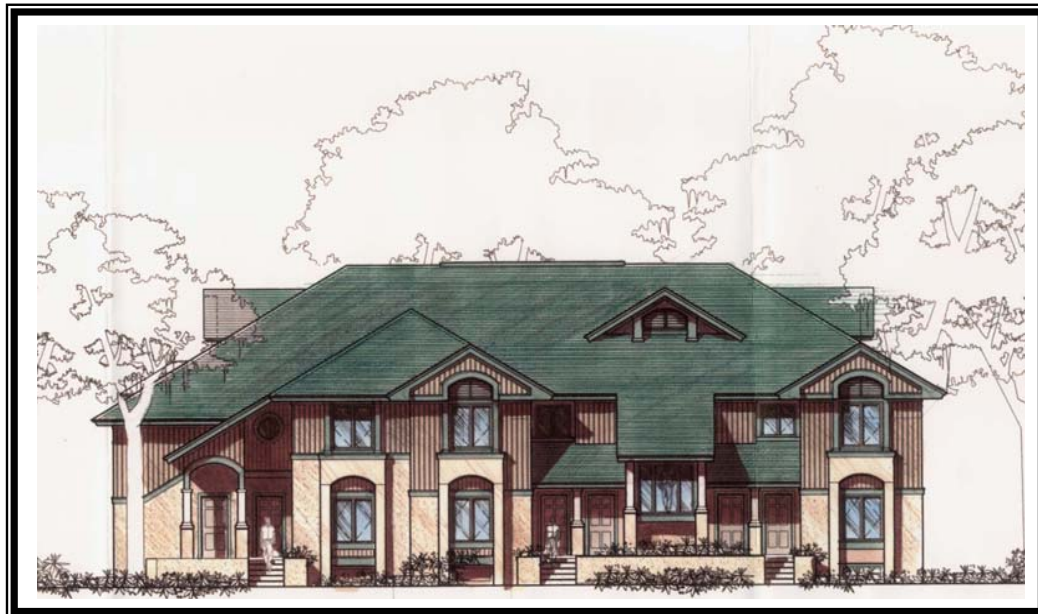
More specifically, structures shall demonstrate the general principles of good design including but not limited to those dealing with form, mass, scale, materials, detail and colors.



**Form.** The form or shape of structures should usually avoid monotonous unbroken planes or unrelieved repetition of shape. Visual interest and shadow play can be created by several techniques including the use of offsetting planes with a variety of depths. Roof form is also a key element to achieve Island Character. Typically gable, hip or shed roof forms are desirable with a minimum pitch of 6/12. In larger structures a variety of forms can provide greater visual interest and break up large roof planes. Flat roof designs should generally not be used unless concealed within another roof or other architectural element. Overhangs of sufficient depth and in proportion to the façade height can also be important to roof form and for shadow play.



**Mass.** The structure shall not be of such mass that it dominates its surroundings or adjacent development. Architectural form and detailing must be used to reduce the appearance of the mass of the structure. While height limits are established in Chapter 5 of the LMO, upper areas of taller structures should be designed to minimize their visual appearance. Larger structures will require a greater degree of sensitivity to site location and inclusion of larger forms of landscaping.



**Scale.** The proportions of a structure shall be such that a sense of human scale is established. That is, the size of architectural elements should not be overpowering and should relate to pedestrian circulation. Nor should they create a sense of confinement or confusion. A horizontal emphasis and limited vertical treatment can be used to control scale. Architectural elements such as trellises, canopies, terraces or porches at grade level are also important to consider in achieving human scale.

**Materials.** Generally materials common to the area or historically present should be selected. A variety of compatible contrasting textures should be used to provide visual interest. Single material façades are usually not appropriate. Materials should be arranged in logical fashion (lighter above heavier) and in relationship to other materials in terms of percentage (not equal or dominating.) Reflective materials other than glass must be avoided. The use of wood or wood simulating materials is strongly encouraged.

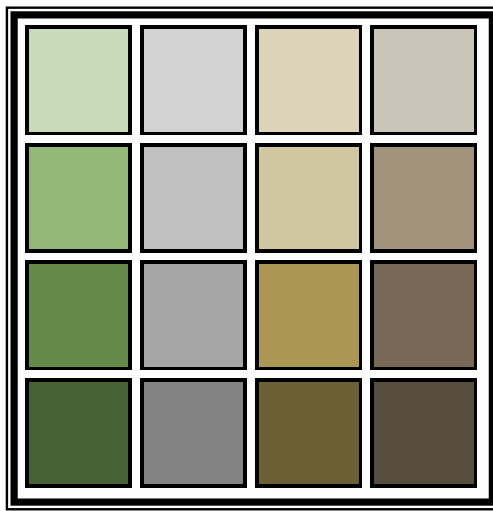
**Detail.** Architectural details must be given adequate consideration. Clean, simple, appropriate details are desirable while excessive ornamentation is to be avoided. Details should be consistent with the design concept for the entire structure. Their purpose should be to provide visual interest, scale or architectural expression. Elements such as shutters or dormers should be functional so as not to appear as false features. Window openings must be in proportion to the façade or façade element and have a unified relationship in overall design.





**Color: Context:** The overall exterior color scheme must be selected to be harmonious with the neighborhood and blend with the natural surroundings of the site. Earth tones must be chosen as the predominate colors. Colors shall not be used to cause the structure to stand out from others or its background. Consideration must be given to the compatibility of colors with those existing in the vicinity. The size of the structure and the amount of shading it will receive are also a factor in selection of colors.

**EXAMPLE:** Colors that may be approved on sites with good tree coverage providing adequate shading may not be approved on a site in bright sun.



**EARTH TONES**

**Color: Hue:** Any accent colors shall be of analogous tints, shades or tones that are low in intensity or brightness. Primary, secondary and highly saturated, bright tertiary colors should be avoided. Accent colors may only be approved for very limited use where appropriate to highlight a feature of the design or provide visual interest. The number of such colors shall be limited to no more than two and must be compatible within the overall color scheme.

**EXAMPLE:** A small area of brighter color may be appropriate to emphasize an architectural detail but would not be approved for a larger area.

### VARIATIONS OF HUE

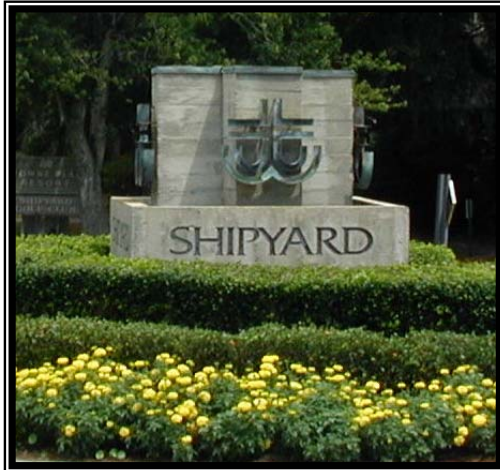


**Color: Contrast:** Exterior color schemes must avoid placing together colors with values that are highly contrasting. Subtle levels of contrast are desirable to emphasize architectural elements or to provide visual interest. The use of black, white or off-white may be approved only for very limited use where a high level of contrast is warranted.

**EXAMPLE:** On a two-story structure a slightly darker wall color on the bottom story may help reduce the visual height of the building.

## ACCESSORY CONSTRUCTION

Thought must also be given to the design and placement of other elements that may be part of a project with the aim being to achieve overall coordination. These may include signs, awnings, sculpture & fountains, lighting and utilities and equipment.



**Signs.** Signs are an important element to most commercial buildings and developments. Too often no allowance is made in the design of projects for the placement of such signs. Many of the principles for good design of structures also apply to signs. Sign design does not begin with a blank sheet of paper. The materials, details and colors of the building are all starting points for the sign design. In other words, signs should reflect the design of the project they are intended to identify.

The size and number of signs will be determined by LMO Chapter 5, Article XIII. Signs should serve to identify the business or development and not act as advertisements. Tenant signs should be uniform in design and placed on the façade of the



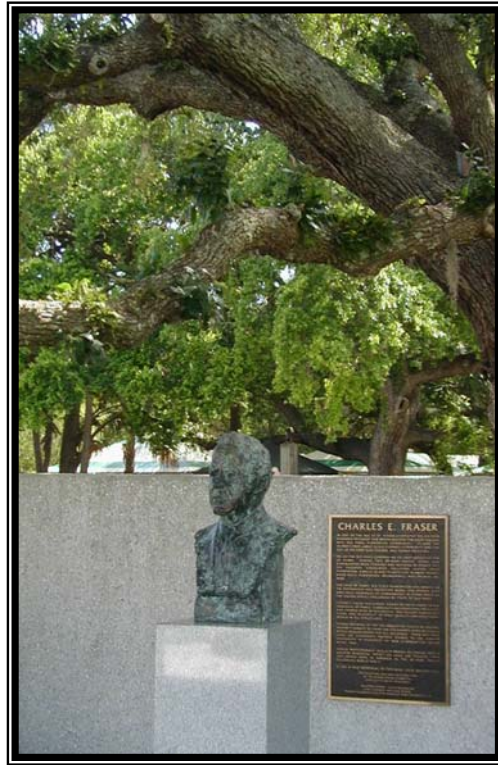
tenant space. Lighting, if used, must be completely shielded from streets and pathways. Bright colors and reflective surfaces should be avoided or very limited in size.

Freestanding or monument signs should be placed in logical locations near the project's entrance drive. They should provide strong visual interest, three dimensional design and high quality, durable construction. Vinyl copy on painted plywood supported by 4X4 wood posts does not demonstrate Island Character. Adequate landscaping must be provided to blend the sign into the site. For façade signs adequate wall space must be provided in a location that will allow the sign to function properly while also appear as if it "belongs" with the building.



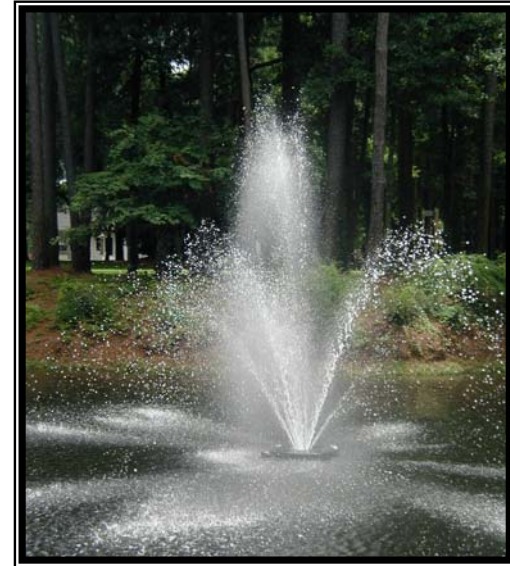


**Awnings.** Fabric awnings may be appropriate if integral to the architectural design of the structure and not a dominant feature. If used they should have substantial structural support and not just metal pipes. Only high quality fade-resistant fabric may be used and periodic replacement must be ensured. Color and pattern choices are critical in designing a successful awning. Bright colors or elaborate patterns are generally not desirable. Awnings should not be incorporated solely to provide space for sign copy.



### **Sculpture & Fountains.**

Projects are encouraged to create interesting outdoor spaces that include appropriate items of visual interest such as sculpture or fountains. While it is not intended to limit artistic expression certain parameters are necessary. The design of such items must be in keeping with the size and scale of the project and not dominate the site. They should generally be subtle in material and color. Fountains should have natural forms that reflect their island location. In the design of sculpture, themes based on the culture and history of the Island are most appropriate.



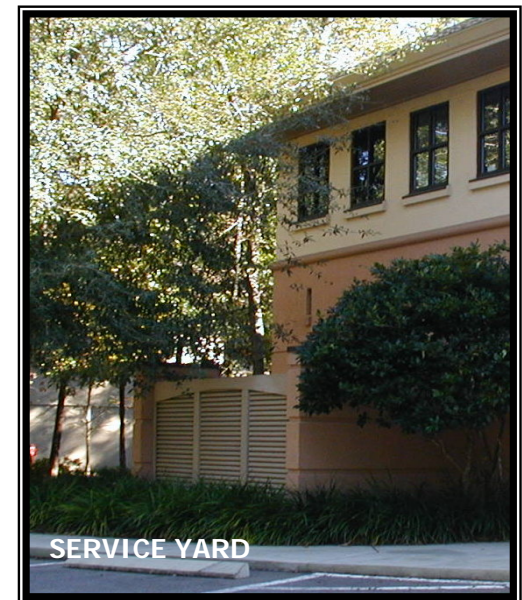
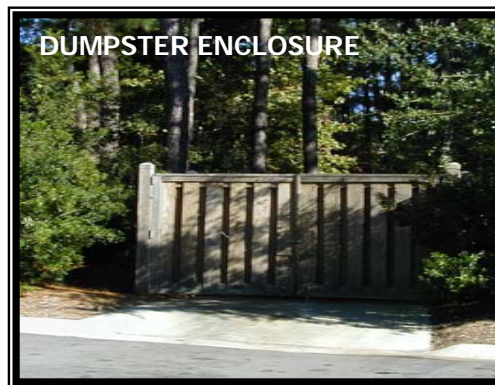
**Lighting.** Hilton Head Island is noted for its lack of glaring excessive lights. Strict requirements for general site lighting are specified in LMO Chapter 5, Article XIV. However, other decorative type lighting is allowed if limited in scope and properly designed. The goal is to add to the visual quality of the development without detracting from the beauty of the night sky. Such lighting may include concealed low wattage landscape up lights for significant trees or shrubbery at an entryway. Low bollard type lighting can be used to illuminate walkways and drive aisles. Important architectural elements can be softly illuminated to add emphasis at night. Incandescent lamps are preferred over metal halide.



**Utilities & Equipment.** All utility or service lines must be underground or concealed within the structure. Exposed wires, pipes or conduits are not acceptable. Any transformers, meters, compressors or utility cabinets must be located in a non-prominent location and screened from view.

Solid waste receptacles must be located in a non-prominent location and screened from view. In most cases a fence as described elsewhere in this guide will be required.

Vending machines or other such equipment if placed on the exterior should be concealed from view of the street or parking area.





## NOTES:

# **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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